

A major challenge for law firms is getting secretaries to work in teams, share workloads and thus improve service to fee earners and clients. Not at Paris Smith & Randall however, where the WinScribe digital dictation system from SRC has enabled the firm to evolve its working practices and enable change.



Paris Smith & Randall

- Commercial, Public Sector and Private Client Law Firm
- Single office in Southampton
- 150 Staff, including 72 fee earners

Benefits At A Glance

- Enabled team working
- Allowed number of fee earners to increase without needing new secretaries - improved fee earner to secretary ratio
- Increased flexibility - fee earners can dictate in the office, on the move or at home
- Secretaries can manage their own workload much more effectively
- Improved audio quality
- Improved client service

Southampton based Paris Smith & Randall is an Investor in People organisation which has been providing top-class legal services for over 185 years. Today the firm provides services to commercial, public sector and private clients and has 19 LLP partners and over 150 staff, 72 of whom are fee earners. In 2003, frustrated by the inefficiencies of its analogue tape system, Philip Rich, IT director at the firm, and his team started to look at the benefits that introducing a digital dictation system could deliver.

ANALOGUE INEFFICIENCIES

"Ours was a common story," says Mr. Rich. "Not only did the analogue system we were using mean that we had to physically move tapes around the organisation, which meant documents were taking too long to turnaround, but the system was also creating other inefficiencies. Secretaries struggled with poor sound quality, all too often work would be accidentally erased, tapes would break or get lost and replacements were proving an expensive consumable item."

"We needed a solution that would eliminate these factors, increase our employee's ability to teamwork and most importantly, raise the level of service to our clients."

"With these factors in mind, the decision to introduce digital dictation was an obvious one; the only real choice we needed to make was which system would best help us achieve our goals."

Philip and his team evaluated 3 major systems, not only in terms of functionality and performance, but also in terms of the manufacturers' ability to continue to invest in the product. "Our decision to select WinScribe from SRC was two-fold; firstly the system offers a number of unique technologies that we knew would deliver more substantial benefits for fee earners and secretaries than other systems, such as more intelligent management of work to encourage increased team working and the ability for our fee earners to dictate productively while away from the office."

"Secondly, being the world's number one system gave us the confidence that WinScribe would be around for many years to come. The last thing we wanted was to purchase a system from a smaller vendor and then find we had an unsupported, obsolete product in a few years time. It's also clear that this market strength has enabled the company to invest heavily in product development, which means continued innovations to improve our solution."

The solution provided by WinScribe's UK's exclusive Platinum Partner, SRC, comprised the WinScribe digital dictation system, Philips SpeechMikes for dictation via PC and a 4-line telephony facility to enable fee earners to dictate via any fixed-line or mobile telephone when working remotely or on the move. In addition, SRC provided project management, training and support services to ensure the system's successful introduction and continued high-quality performance.

PROVIDING THE TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE TEAM WORKING

Mr. Rich continues: "Technically the WinScribe system's approach to the management of dictation was clearly more advanced than that of other systems. Rather than slavishly replicating the analogue process of sending jobs to specific secretaries no matter what resource is available, WinScribe uses a system of job types, which were defined by us with the assistance of the SRC team, to determine where and how work is distributed."

"Now when a fee earner dictates a job, he or she selects the appropriate job type, records the dictation, submits the job and that's it. There's no need for a fee earner to work out which secretary is able to transcribe the dictation because the system takes care of it all automatically. On the other side of the process, whichever secretaries are authorised to complete the work have immediate access to it, meaning that work can be transcribed as soon as a secretary becomes



Philip Rich
IT Director, Paris Smith & Randall

Quotes At A Glance

- *"It's given us the opportunity to evolve our working processes so that now we have a more cohesive team, and one that is only too willing, and more importantly able, to teamwork."* Philip Rich, IT Director
- *"It's had a massive impact on our performance, and ultimately that means a better service for our clients."* Richard Smith, Managing Partner

Solution At A Glance

Initially, SRC provided:

- 18 Concurrent WinScribe Secretary Licences
- 20 Philips SpeechMikes
- 2 Ports for Mobile Telephone Dictation
- 2 Days Training for Secretaries, 3 Days for Authors
- Project Management
- Ongoing Support
- Upgrade Assurance

Subsequently, Paris Smith & Randall received:

- 29 Concurrent WinScribe Secretary Licences
- 42 Philips SpeechMikes
- 2 Olympus DS-330s
- 2 Telephony Ports

available and not just when the fee earner's specific secretary has cleared his or her workload."

"The result has been a dramatic increase in the level of work sharing throughout the firm which makes life easier for both fee earners and secretaries and has meant our document turnaround times have fallen considerably."

"We were sure that digital dictation could provide a better way to approach how we worked and most importantly, one that could make us more efficient with minimal effort," continues Mr. Rich.

"The key thing to remember about digital dictation is that it's not an analogue product, so there should be no reason to blindly emulate the analogue process. Certainly for us, it's given us the opportunity to evolve our working processes so that now we have a more cohesive team, and one that is only too willing, and more importantly able, to teamwork."

THE RIGHT FIT FOR PARIS SMITH & RANDALL'S PEOPLE

Paris Smith & Randall first piloted the WinScribe system for 40 of its staff and then soon moved to roll-out the system firm-wide, a programme that was completed in October 2004. At each stage SRC trained users and worked in close contact with the firm's IT team to manage every aspect of the project, both in terms of technical requirements and human factors. "Of all the IT systems we have introduced to the firm over the last few years, I can honestly say that this has been one of the easiest and most successfully adopted," explains Mr. Rich. "The deployment was fully managed by SRC who went to great lengths to understand not only the technical features of our operation but also how the system would fit into the culture of the firm, in this respect their advice and experience with other law firms was invaluable."

The human element of the installation was one to which SRC paid considerable attention. When introducing any new technology there can be a degree of cynicism and apprehension surrounding the impact that the new system will have on individuals' roles and the changes it will bring.

Prior to installation, a team from SRC demonstrated the system to prospective users, including a selection of Paris Smith & Randall secretaries. Emma Wakly, a secretary in the Commercial Property Litigation department says she had some reservations about the impact that digital dictation would have before the presentation. "While I was fairly open-minded about the introduction of digital dictation, I still had a few fears about what its impact would be, particularly as to whether this ultimately meant we were going to be replaced by computers."

"I'm pleased to say all my fears were unfounded, in fact quite the contrary. The system has significantly improved working life for me and other secretaries at the firm. For a start, the quality of sound is much better than that of analogue tapes and for the first time, we can easily manage our daily workload. The system makes it very clear what jobs are a priority and we're free to work on any available job without having to make special arrangements or pass tapes back and forth between each other."

"The ultimate result is that we're all better utilised, there are less peaks and troughs in workload and we feel more fulfilled by our contribution to the firm's success, not to mention the fact that we're no longer faced with pile upon pile of tapes and files - the working day now passes much quicker!"

COST EFFECTIVE GROWTH AND QUALITY SERVICE

Richard Smith, senior partner at the firm, adds: "At the core of everything we do as a firm is a drive to deliver the very best legal product possible and naturally this includes providing excellent levels of client service. In order to achieve this goal, we've long recognised the importance that working conditions and IT systems play in our staff's ability to perform. Since its introduction, the WinScribe system from SRC has made a significant difference to our service delivery."

"As Investors in People, we were also naturally drawn to a solution that promotes team work and provides the facilities for fee earners and secretaries to work more flexibly whether in the office, on the move or at home."

Paris Smith & Randall's strategy is to continue its organic growth, increasing revenue by around £4m to £15m in the next 3 years. "While we've been steadily building the number of our fee earners, we haven't needed to hire secretaries at the same rate, which has reduced our operating overheads and minimised our requirement for office space."

Summing up the impact of digital dictation, Mr Smith says: "Much is made in the press about the benefit of digital dictation for large firms, but I'd urge firms of our size and smaller not to dismiss the impact that the technology can have for them too. Certainly, it's had a massive impact on our performance, not only our ability to grow cost effectively, but also on the working life of our staff, both fee earners and secretaries alike, and ultimately that means a better service for our clients."